

RCW 43.216.020 Department duties. (1) The department shall implement state early learning policy and coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funding as efficiently as possible. The department's duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) To support both public and private sectors toward a comprehensive and collaborative system of early learning that serves parents, children, and providers and to encourage best practices in child care and early learning programs;

(b) To make early learning resources available to parents and caregivers;

(c) To carry out activities, including providing clear and easily accessible information about quality and improving the quality of early learning opportunities for young children, in cooperation with the nongovernmental private-public partnership;

(d) To administer child care and early learning programs;

(e) To safeguard and promote the health, safety, and well-being of children receiving child care and early learning assistance, which is paramount over the right of any person to provide such care;

(f) To apply data already collected comparing the following factors and make recommendations to the legislature in a time frame which corresponds to the child care and development fund federal reporting requirements, regarding working connections subsidy and state-funded preschool rates and compensation models that would attract and retain high quality early learning professionals:

(i) State-funded early learning subsidy rates and market rates of licensed early learning homes, centers, and outdoor nature-based child care;

(ii) Compensation of early learning educators in licensed centers, homes, and outdoor nature-based child care, and early learning teachers at state higher education institutions;

(iii) State-funded preschool program compensation rates and Washington state head start program compensation rates; and

(iv) State-funded preschool program compensation to compensation in similar comprehensive programs in other states;

(g) To administer the early support for infants and toddlers program in RCW 43.216.580, serve as the state lead agency for Part C of the federal individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA), and develop and adopt rules that establish minimum requirements for the services offered through Part C programs, including allowable allocations and expenditures for transition into Part B of the federal individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA);

(h) To standardize internal financial audits, oversight visits, performance benchmarks, and licensing criteria, so that programs can function in an integrated fashion;

(i) To support the implementation of the nongovernmental private-public partnership and cooperate with that partnership in pursuing its goals including providing data and support necessary for the successful work of the partnership;

(j) To work cooperatively and in coordination with the early learning council;

(k) To collaborate with the K-12 school system at the state and local levels to ensure appropriate connections and smooth transitions between early learning and K-12 programs;

(l) To develop and adopt rules for administration of the program of early learning established in RCW 43.216.555;

(m) To develop a comprehensive birth-to-three plan to provide education and support through a continuum of options including, but not limited to, services such as: Home visiting; quality incentives for infant and toddler child care subsidies; quality improvements for family home and center-based child care programs serving infants and toddlers; professional development; early literacy programs; and informal supports for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers; and

(n) Upon the development of an early learning information system, to make available to parents timely inspection and licensing action information and provider comments through the internet and other means.

(2) When additional funds are appropriated for the specific purpose of home visiting and parent and caregiver support, the department must reserve at least eighty percent for home visiting services to be deposited into the home visiting services account and up to twenty percent of the new funds for other parent or caregiver support.

(3) Home visiting services must include programs that serve families involved in the child welfare system.

(4) The department's programs shall be designed in a way that respects and preserves the ability of parents and legal guardians to direct the education, development, and upbringing of their children, and that recognizes and honors cultural and linguistic diversity. The department shall include parents and legal guardians in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children. [2021 c 304 § 5. Prior: 2020 c 262 § 5; 2020 c 90 § 4; 2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 § 202; 2016 c 57 § 5; 2013 c 323 § 5; prior: 2010 c 233 § 1; 2010 c 232 § 2; 2010 c 231 §6; 2007 c 394 § 5; 2006 c 265 § 103. Formerly RCW 43.215.020.]

Effective date—2020 c 90: See note following RCW 43.216.580.

Effective date—2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 §§ 102, 104-115, 201-227, 301-337, 401-419, 501-513, 801-803, and 805-822: See note following RCW 43.216.025.

Effective date—2010 c 233: "This act takes effect July 1, 2010." [2010 c 233 § 4.]

Finding—Declaration—Captions not law—2007 c 394: See notes following RCW 43.216.010.